

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-10 (Canceled).

Claim 11 (Currently Amended): A process for fractionating a starting mixture of at least two or more components by extractive distillation using a selective solvent in a dividing wall column, wherein comprising

carrying out the process ~~is carried out~~ in a dividing wall column having a dividing wall aligned in a longitudinal direction of the column and extending to an upper end of the column and dividing an interior of the column into a first region, a second region, and a lower combined column region,

feeding the starting mixture ~~is fed~~ into the first region, taking off a first top stream ~~is taken off~~ from the first region, and taking off a second top stream ~~is taken off~~ from the second region, with each of the streams having a ~~prescribed specification~~ preset composition,

introducing the selective solvent ~~is introduced~~ in an upper part of the first region or in an upper part of the second region, and

setting the flow of solvent into the first region or flow of solvent into the second region ~~are set~~ so that each of the ~~prescribed specifications~~ preset compositions for the top streams are met.

Claim 12 (Currently Amended): A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein a stream of the selective solvent is introduced ~~[[only]]~~ in the upper part of the first region.

Claim 13 (Currently Amended): A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein a stream of the selective solvent is introduced ~~[[only]]~~ in the upper part of the second region.

Claim 14 (Previously Presented): A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein a side stream is taken off from the lower combined column region and laden solvent from the bottom of the column is degassed in a bottom vaporizer and taken off as a purified solvent stream.

Claim 15 (Previously Presented): A process as claimed in claim 14, wherein the laden solvent is recycled to the extractive distillation.

Claim 16 (Currently Amended): A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein ~~one or more~~ at least one liquid ~~streams~~ stream or ~~substreams~~ substream is taken off from the dividing wall column at ~~one or more~~ at least one thermodynamically suitable theoretical ~~plates~~ plate, partly or completely vaporized by heat transfer from hot, degassed solvent stream, and returned to the dividing wall column.

Claim 17 (Currently Amended): A process as claimed in claim 16, wherein the ~~one or more~~ at least one liquid ~~streams~~ stream or ~~substreams~~ substream is returned to the dividing wall column at a same theoretical plate from which the liquid stream or substream had been taken off.

Claim 18 (Currently Amended): A ~~method of using a~~ process as claimed in claim 11, ~~for fractionating~~ wherein the starting mixture is a hydrocarbon ~~mixtures~~ mixture or an aromatic ~~mixtures~~ mixture.

Claim 19 (Currently Amended): A ~~method of using a~~ process as claimed in claim 11, ~~for fractionating wherein the starting mixture is a~~ hydrocarbon ~~mixture~~ mixture of C₄ fractions or C₅ fractions.

Claim 20 (Currently Amended): A ~~method of using a~~ process as claimed in claim 11, ~~for fractionating wherein the starting mixture is a aromatic mixture~~ mixture of benzene/toluene/xylene ~~mixture~~ or ~~mixture~~ a mixture of isomeric xylenes.

Claim 21 (New): A process as claimed in claim 19, wherein the starting mixture is a hydrocarbon mixture of C₄ fractions.

Claim 22 (New): A process as claimed in claim 19, wherein the starting mixture is a hydrocarbon mixture of C₅ fractions.

Claim 23 (New): A process as claimed in claim 20, wherein the starting mixture is a mixture of benzene/toluene/xylene.

Claim 24 (New): A process as claimed in claim 20, wherein the starting mixture is a mixture of isomeric xylenes.

Claim 25 (New): A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein the dividing wall is installed centrally in the column.

Claim 26 (New): A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein the dividing wall is installed offcenter in the column.

Claim 27 (New): A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein backscrubbing trays are provided in the region and above the feed point in which the selective solvent is introduced.

Claim 28 (New): A process as claimed in claim 27, wherein the backscrubbing trays are valve trays.

Claim 29 (New): A process as claimed in claim 27, wherein the backscrubbing trays are bubble cap trays.

Claim 30 (New): A process as claimed in claim 27, wherein the backscrubbing trays are Thormann trays.